



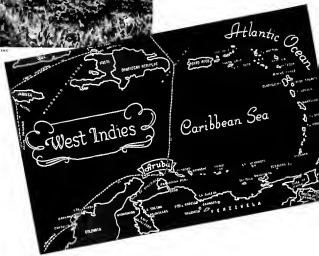
For nine months of the year the trade winds blow across Aruba, never ceasing, never ceasing in direction, and it may not rain for a year. The trees are banyan-trees.

COURTESY OF BRUNNEN

# THE LUCKY GIRLS OF ARUBA

OR 7516 MILES TO CASPER, WYOMING

By BEN ROBERTSON



DOWN in the Caribbean Sea there is a colony of vagrant Americans on a Dutch island called Aruba where the women have the men in a perfect situation. The men are all young engineers, and a lot of them are handsome but that matters less to the girls than that they are the kind of men who will get ahead. They have the best training American colleges of engineering can give them, they are drawing down real money, and there are twenty of them to every woman in the colony. That is how it happens that those girls have got the boys in the alley where they would like to have them. It's a paradise for American women, the Aruba. The men

are there on two-year contracts, and although they can see the South American shore line on a clear day, they can't get over there readily. They are cooped up on an island, and the trade winds blow, and, at night, the Southern Cross shines in the tropical sky. It's just like something out of a book. The girls get twenty invitations to dance, swim, to golf, to go exploring in caves, to fish for sharks, to look for hazards and pirate treasure, to hike, to watch the ocean floor through the glass bottom of a boat. The boys even take the girls sailing and they do not complain when the girls make such remarks as "Oh, look, one sail goes this way and one goes that way—

poof, poof." Most of the weddings take place in the church at Oranjestad, the Dutch capital of the little island. The distance is not much from the colony, and the road is paved. One of the principal problems of the Americans on Aruba is keeping stenographers and schoolteachers on the job.

We can see ourselves at Aruba as other people see us. The island is a speck in the ocean, half the size of an average United States county, and the compound that the Americans have leased until May 1, 2000, occupies only a fraction of the island. Isolated and condensed, the Aruba American community is a capsule America. It is a United States about two miles square. And it is sixty miles west of Curaçao and about twenty miles off the coast of Venezuela.

Twenty-five hundred Americans are in this colony, and they run the biggest oil refinery in the world. They bring in all their drinking water in tankers from New Jersey, and all their food except some local fish and bananas comes from New York, more than 1800 sea miles. The women order their clothes from the New York department stores and from American mail-order catalogues. They are very American. Once they held a Miss Aruba contest; the women's club staged a campaign for More Shade Trees; the chief of police is a regular cow-town sheriff, totting a six-shooter; and when we tried prohibition in the United States, they tried it, too, in Aruba.

There was no depression on Aruba and there is no unemployment. Everyone has money. The Americans live in \$6000

storehouses, and they do not have to bother about buying so much as a telescope holder unless they wish. The company provides everything. The company has a retirement plan for their old age, and, as the oil business gets bigger every year, they have complete faith in the security of the future. Only last year they started a \$200,000 hospital, and then had to put it on tracks before it was finished and move it more than a mile to make room for new units for the refinery. Business is booming at Aruba. About all they have to worry about is how they are going to get the money Germany owes them and what would happen

if sometime a warship should appear and drop just one shell among the storage tanks. That they might lose contact with the United States worries them most of all. Some make big plans for trips round South America and to Europe, but when the time comes for their long vacation, they usually catch the first tanker for Baton Rouge or New York. They are afraid, if they stay away from home more than two years, that the United States will change or they will change, and that is the last thing they want to happen. They cannot bear the thought of ever becoming exiles. At home again, they buy a new car and visit Cousin Lucy, and then drop in on Cousin Sarah, because Cousin Sarah won't like it if they go to Cousin Lucy's house and do not come to hers.

They make the family rounds and eat a lot of fried chicken and talk big about Aruba, and, that over, they find they still have about fifty days on their hands. And, as every American knows, fifty days is a long time for an American to loaf. They decide to see the country; they go to Maine and to California and Florida, and sometimes they see how far they can drive in a day. Some of those Aruba Americans have driven from Iowa into New York without stopping anywhere except at filling stations. They're glad to leave Aruba, and usually they are glad to get back. They are possessors—descendants in spirit of Daniel Boone and Lewis and Clark and Father Serra. They are people of the kind that opened up the West with the Pike's-Peak-or-bust spirit—you can tell by the way they talk. They are constantly referring to "the old days" and "the early days"—meaning twelve years ago. In twelve years they have seen the island make the cycle of American civilization, from construction camp to boom town to settled community. They started out with nothing but a barren strip of coral, and now they have the biggest refinery in existence, and they have brought every stick and stone of it in by ship; they have set up a \$55,000,000 plant

Sometimes, too, you will see them staring at the tanks and towers that gleam with brilliant aluminum paint—aluminum paint is used, not because it is beautiful in the tropical moon and sun, but because it best combats evaporation. You will see the men watching the sunset, it is their sunset now, a perfect artificial ermine-though the heavy gray smoke. These scenes often make the old-timers reminiscent. They came to Aruba, some of them, in schooners, sleeping on deck under a piece of canvas, and the best feature of those voyages was down with Aruba straight ahead.

#### A Slice of the United States

CRUISE lines put into Aruba now, and there is a cruise service—they can fly to Miami in seven hours. The large coral, swept completely of soil by the constant winds, were out their shoes quickly, and as the only new ones obtainable were from the sleep chests of tramp ships, the men used to swarm on board those vessels like South Sea islanders trying to trade copra for beads and what have you. In the first shocks that they flung up, three men had to sleep in the kitchen and six in the living room.

One of the first American women to arrive was so uneasy that she used to sit up at night with a pistol, reading by a kerosene lamp. She has pile carpets in her pink stucco home now, and silver and linen and china and an electric refrigerator. She has an automobile, and although Aruba is only fourteen miles long and four and a half miles wide, she often drives a thousand miles in a month. She has seen the camp pass from the hatter stage to socialized state, and she is still young. They are all still young on Aruba, even the bosses; they are young and their industry is young. Sometimes the Dutch, who own the island, do not understand.

These Americans have taken the U. S. with them. That is, they have taken everything but a cemetery.

matter of course, then going to Virginia to hunt foxes with those dudes and falling off a horse.

About the only thing you ever get that you are far away is when some fellow, tanned with homesickness, suddenly remarks, "I'd like to strike out and drive and drive, I'd like to drive a thousand miles and never see salt water." A continent man has begun to talk on an island. The restless conversation then will drift on. Someone will praise New Orleans. "That New Orleans is the town for me." And he will be taken up. "Give me the West every time." Inevitably, some Southerner will say something about the damn Yankees, and will be put in his place immediately by someone saying, "We're all Southerners in Aruba, pal. We're farther south than the United Daughters of the Confederacy."

They are all Republicans, too, whenever they make business trips across to Venezuela. The Aruba Americans know that the Venezuelans are mighty suspicious about radicals entering their country, so, whenever the Americans are asked to put down their political affiliation, they always write "Republican." They are not sure what the word "Democrat" may connote to a Venezuelan official, but they all feel that "Republican" will be understood. Is not Venezuela known as the Republica de Venezuela? One day an Albatross was telling, with remorse, about how strange it made him feel to write "Republican" after his name. He said, "I sure hope the news of this never gets back to Alabama."

Eventually, though, the news did get back, just as all the big interviews that the Aruba Americans give out in the United States always get back in time to Aruba. They keep a file of those interviews at Aruba, and they think they are very funny. In one, an Aruban on leave told the reporter that Americans live behind barbed-wire entanglements on Aruba, with soldiers to guard them against natives pitching poisoned spears. The Mark Twain strain is in them.



Back and forth to Aruba from Venezuela, twenty miles away, twenty-eight shallow-draft boats shuttle merchandise, arriving loaded at dawn, returning empty in the evening.

COURTESY OF STANDARD OIL CO.

themselves and have forced it into operation; they have done it all—success folks. They have made things hustle where nothing ever hustled before, and that is the reason there is so little humidity among the Americans on that island.

The only time they become genuinely humble is when they see the pillar of cloud that hangs over Aruba by day and the pillar of fire by night, for the plant is never allowed to stop now. Every twenty-four hours, the huge cracking units turn out 250,000 barrels of oil. Sometimes, ought in this contemplative mood, they will tell you they can scarcely believe it is possible for anyone to do what they have done.

Americans are not buried on Aruba. Like the Chinese, when they die, they are shipped back where they came from. They work in three shifts, just as they would at home, and there is none of that dressing-for-dinner business that the British are always talking about. The Americans sit down to dinner in their working clothes when the whistle blows at noon. And, listening to their dinner talk, you would never dream you were a mile removed from the United States. Someone will wonder if it is really true that Babe Ruth has saved his money, and someone else will begin a typical American yarn about being born and reared on a ranch, riding all day as a

Like any American community, they have a book club, a Spanish club, a ceramics class, a nature-study group, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, a little theater, Aruba Post No. 1 of the American Legion, a fleet of snipe-class, six-meter sloops, and a yacht club with a saluting gun. They hold hog-calling contests, baseball games, horseshoe matches, art exhibitions, flower shows, and there is a poker game that started in 1827. Once the men get up a hot-home-baked-pie contest and induced twenty-eight women to compete. The judges ate the pies, and when the women wanted to know who had won, the men said it was a twenty-eight-corner tie.

(Continued on Page 7)

## THE LUCKY GIRLS OF ARUBA

(Continued from Page 9)

Aruba also has Society. Social strata are based on the old American principle of who got there first. The big boss and the No. 2 man both came down in the early days with a lot of cowboys and cow-shepherders from the old country around Casper, Wyoming. So the folks from Wyoming outrank all the others. Next come the people from the refinery at Whiting, Indiana, followed by those from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Charleston, South Carolina. It burns up Charlestonians to have to play second fiddle to Casper, Wyoming, but Aruba is Aruba. Then, there are a lot of Texans from around Houston who rate. They keep in steady touch with Texas, as distinct from the United States, and most of them plan to send their boys to college at Texas A. and M.

The ladies give bridge parties for forty and supper parties for twenty, and they talk about the babies and the servants problems. Most of the younger couples are of the same age and most of them have families coming along, so they do not bore one another with the baby talk. However, there never yet has been a formal party given at Aruba that at least twice during the evening the phone did not ring, saying No. 11, or No. 7, was coming up, and some of the men had to hurry off to the plant. The thing that irritates the ladies most about these interruptions is that they are never quite sure that the phone calls aren't a stall.

The servants are mostly West Indian Negroes who speak with a broad British accent and annoy the women by calling them "Madam." Wages are fifty-five guilders a month, with meals thrown in and Sundays off. Few of the maids will wash after putting a hand to an iron. It has something to do with rheumatism. One woman's cook won't put her hands in hot water at all, and another one insists on wearing evening gowns that are better than any her employer possesses. The American women can't leave the dishes overnight, on account of cockroaches, and they complain that coffee cools more quickly in Aruba than it does in the United States.

The hairdresser's is a favorite gathering place. They have a nice-hole, 34-per golf course with asphalt putting greens and coral-and-lead fairways, with tufts of grass, and goals and ectopic hedges as hazards.

They subscribe to their home-town papers, turn in American newspapers, listen to the New York orchestra and operas, follow the football and baseball seasons, and keep up with the horses, and they have that strange and peculiar American characteristic that will not permit them to admit that anything is wrong with their weather. The trade wind blows without stopping for nine months, never varying, always from the same direction, and there is always the smoke and the smell of the refinery, and, like men on a ship, they are never far removed from their place of business, and the sun shines, day after day, and sometimes for a year there will be no rain. It gets on their nerves. But defensively they will tell you how they are able to plan a picnic almost any time of year without having to bother about the possibility of showers, and if they suspect you are getting the impression the weather is monotonously the same, they will tell you about the time they had a flood, a hurricane and an earthquake.

Like all American communities, Aruba has its town characters. Aruba's are Chief Brook, the six-foot county-contra sheriff, and Jim Bluejacket, a tremendous Cherokee, who carries a red bandanna in his hip pocket, wears a cap on the side of his head, and used to pitch ball for Cincinnati in the National and Brooklyn in the old Federal League. Jim is foreman of the welders, but his fame comes from his conversation. He presides over a coffee table at Chief Brook's office at ten o'clock every morning and talks about baseball. One morning he was telling about the time the season was over and the boys were getting ready to scatter for the winter. He said one told about planning to hunt quail in Georgia, and another was going to attend to his ranch in Oklahoma, and another one planned to take things easy in Florida. Jim said they all knew they were broke and every one of them knew they would be sleeping on pool tables before Christmas.

Another morning he told about a time he and Grover Land, another old-timer in baseball, had drawn their last dime from the manager; they were broke and needed fifty bucks for a party they wanted to throw. Jim said that Land, who was a genius and his friend, decided they would invite a



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third halfpenny on the party and make him foot the bill. This third fellow was a tightwad, and Bluejecket said they could never get any money from him. But Land said, "My friend, leave it all to me!" So Land went over to the guy and said to him, "Let's you and me and Bluejecket each draw fifty bucks from the boss and pitch a real party."

The fellow said, "Okok," so they went down to the lobby, and Land said Bluejecket over to the boss. The boss was sitting in a log chair, a hand hat on his head, reading a paper, and Bluejecket said, "Chief, is it going to rain today?" The boss said, "No." Bluejecket came back, shaking his head, and Land said, "He turned you down, didn't he?" Bluejecket replied, "He sure did." "Well, I'll try him," said Land. Then Land went over and said, "Have we been to Chicago four times this year?" The boss said, "No." Land returned, shaking his head. "He turned me down, too," said Land. The fellow went next, and he said to the boss, "Could you let me have fifty bucks?" And the boss said, "Sure." Bluejecket said that fellow said to them, "proud as you please." "He didn't turn me down."

One morning Bluejecket came into the coffee room complaining that the Americans were certainly shipping out Aruba. He said the water had been turned off two hours and 150 telephone calls had come in, all howling. He said once in the old days the water was turned off four days before anybody noticed it.

### The Law

Chief Brook is the politician, judge, prosecuting attorney and jury. He has a uniform and a big Dutch hedge which certifies that he is a *hulsteyn* man *politie*. He takes the hedge with him whenever he goes to New York. On the back is the royal coat of arms of the Netherlands and a motto that says either "I shall maintain" or "God shall maintain." Brook is not sure which. Brook's own personal motto is "The good that you do is best done down." He greets strangers at the gate with "We're proud of Aruba," and he hopes that he has not had to shoot at anybody, even on the Fourth of July, in more than nine years.

The Fourth of July, of course, is the big day. Another big day is the thirty-first of August, Queen Wilhelmina's birthday. And last year they got an extra day off to celebrate the birth of an heir to the throne. They are still talking about that at Aruba. The whistle was to blow as soon as the news about Princess Juliana reached the island, and if it blew once, it would announce a new princess and everybody would get one day off, but if it blew twice, it would mean a princess, and there would be two days to celebrate. They say for a week the cele-

brated practically nothing but listen for the whistle. Everyone was hoping Her Royal Highness would give birth to quadruplets, all boys. When the whistle did blow, it blew once, and at night.

They say, at Aruba, the reason they decided to build the refinery on one of Holland's islands instead of on the mainland of Venezuela, where the oil comes from, was that the bar across Maracallo Gulf was too shallow to allow even-going tankers to cross. So they built a fleet of twenty-eight special-type shallow-draft ships to bring the crude over to near-by Aruba, and they refine it there. Like a lot of statements, that is perfectly true as far as it goes. The unstated other portion of that truth is that the Americans have to invest fifty-five millions on an island ruled by the Dutch king in a country whose government may succeed government.

Casper, Wyo.," and started to work. They had stovered strikes, trouble with the Dutch police, shortage of labor, they imported labor and had trouble with them; they had trouble with the Arubans, but they had to compete with the lanky Oldhams who came down for the Chicago Bridge and Iron Company to build the tanks.

The company men worked on a daily-wage basis, but the Oldhams were on piecework, and sometimes they made forty dollars a day. Fred went so high that it cost eight dollars to get into Oranjestad on Saturday night and eight dollars to get back to the camp. About all the company men could do under such circumstances was to try to pick up what cash they could from the tank men as they passed.

The Americans' troubles with the Arubans began one morning when the Arubans failed to show up for work. The Americans went to find out what was wrong; they talked and talked to the Arubans, but the Arubans would only say they were sorry, but they did not wish to work.

### Aruban Kings

The Americans even offered the Arubans more money, but still the Arubans would not come back. In desperation, the Americans then went to see Capt. Jan Beausjon, a Dutch-Aruban harbor pilot, who seemed, from the beginning, to understand Americans.

The captain said he would see what was wrong.

Pretty soon he came back to tell the Americans that they did not understand the Arubans. They had asked the Arubans their names. The Arubans decided to remain on their side patches; they would be better to grow alone for less money. The captain said to the Americans that he would see the Arubans. You must try to win them over. Every Aruban has an idea.

"You cannot kick the Aruban. You must try to win them over. Every Aruban has an idea patch and a little fishing tackle. The Aruban is a king."

The captain told the Americans to appeal to the loyalty of the Arubans and to be patient; then he told the Arubans that the Americans did not mean anything but good. Every Aruban has an idea these good words—"The Americans have good hearts."

Things are running smoothly now on the island. The Americans say the finest things about the Arubans, about their faithfulness and trustworthiness and their wonderful mechanics. "Well," they say the Arubans are fairies in the air, that when tanks and towers are being built, they will go aloft in a forty-mile wind and stay up there all day, taking their dinners with them.

The Dutch, as a gesture of their good will, have decorated two of the company with medals, and the Americans have steeled themselves to drink jenever with the Dutchmen. The Americans believe they ought to be



"Congratulations to, darling—Jimmy got a job as a bank teller."

The Americans moved into Aruba in 1927; the men coming down from the big plateaus of Wyoming for the Standard Oil Company. Most of them had never seen a patch of water bigger than the "mile-wide-and-inch-deep" Powder River, and when they saw where they were to live—a barren island smaller than a ranch—they asked one another what had they ever done to deserve such a fate. The only thing about Aruba that appealed to them at all was the wild ponies, and they planned to have a fine time roping them. Then they learned that there were no horses on Aruba. They said they did not know there was a place in the world without horses.

The men nailed strips of old automobile tires to the soles of their shoes, so they could walk on the sharp sand; they nicknamed their bankhouse "the sheep shed"; they put up a sign on the coral, "Keep off the grass"; painted on a wooden marker, "7316 miles to

gives some credit for this, too, for they say that for Americans to drink the Dutchman's gin is one of the world's supreme achievements in international politeness.

The refinery has eight combination cracking units, each with a capacity of 23,000 barrels of oil a day; three viscosity breaking units, each of 21,250 barrels; a gas oil cracking unit of 9,000 barrels; a vacuum still of 28,000 barrels; an atmospheric crude still of 17,000 barrels; eight rerun stills, and a \$1,500,000 hydrocracking unit that is being watched by the entire international oil industry. This unit, after breaking down the oil molecules, builds it up again by the injection of hydrogen to produce one of the costliest and most efficient of the world's aviation processes.

The plant has a commissary that supplies 7000 persons, a cold-storage unit with daily rations for 10,000, an electric plant that generates enough power to supply a city of 200,000, a laundry that washes 27,000 pounds of clothes a week, a sulphur-rod plant, and tanks to store 11,000,000 barrels of oil.

The plant itself looks like Wells' The Shape of Things to Come, and some of it is so complicated that the Americans say they are beginning to doubt if a man can live his own life and be responsible for one of those machines. Sometimes when something goes wrong, the engineers have to use mathematical and chemical formulas to locate the trouble. The work may not be physical, it may lie in the advanced restraints of chemistry. One of the cooling units is so involved and gigantic that it requires a ten-page memorandum to tell how to shut it down. And the strangest part about the whole place is that, although it is the biggest refinery in the world and although you can always smell the heavy, tarry odor, you never see any oil. All you see is a fleet of ships arriving and docking. They pump start up and you see smoke from the refinery stacks. Then another fleet of larger ships begins loading and sails away. The ships that bring the oil from Venezuela leave Maracaibo one evening and arrive at Aruba the next morning; they leave again at sunset and arrive again at Maracaibo at dawn. Back and forth they shuttle—one of the most monotonous sea runs in the world. The British and the Dutch and the British say the Americans cannot stand such monotony. That is what they say.

### Taming a Coral Island

Because of American tariff restrictions on refined oil they dispose of their products in Europe rather than in the United States; mostly to Great Britain. The oil industry of the Americas has in ten years made little Aruba one of the richest governments in the world. The island has paid off old debts, balanced its budget, set up a credit in the treasury at Caracas, and has become one of the biggest shipping centers of the globe. The Rotterdam tender of Commerce in 1928 listed Aruba as the world's thirtieth-richest port in tonnage.

While the men were building this tremendous industrial plant, the women were making flowers bloom on the coast. Sending to Florida, Mexico, Venezuela and Panama by tanker for seed and roots, the women began their experiments in flowerpots. Gradually, they found they could grow oleanders, senecios, crotons, hibiscuses, the royal poinciana, and that old stand-by, the

innia. Spreading out, they brought soil from one end of Aruba to the other at six guineas a cartload. They fought the hardy and goats and hermit crabs, and at night broke the company rules by watering their flowers with the drinking water from New Jersey. One woman poured a solid slab of concrete over the coral in her yard and then spread a layer of earth over the cement. Today the women are as proud of their gardens as the men are of the refinery, and they say, sooner or later, roses are going to grow at Aruba or else.

### Caribbean Crossroad

And things happen at Aruba. A boatload of escaped men from Devil's Island once put in there. The Americans and Dutch reoffitted them and the boat turned over and had to be out-fitted again.

A famous lone sailor came by in his little boat, and they overhauled his boat and gave him a lot of supplies, and later they read in the National Geographic that Aruba had bare, bleak shores. That was all the sailor said about Aruba in his memoirs.

The Norwegian whalers who make voyages to the Antarctic Ocean every year and think nothing of it, stop at Aruba to take on fuel and then, the Vikings the Americans have picked up stories about what the Norwegians think about Admiral Byrd. But the gayest occasions come when the ships of the American Navy make Aruba a port of call. Then Aruba really gets busy. One time when the cruiser Omaha came in for a three-day stay, the Americans decided to give everyone on board five beer. They had a year and a half's supply on hand at the club—it was a kind of beer that they didn't like. They say the sailors didn't exactly drink it, the entire amount in three days, but they sure did make a dent in it.

The Americans at Aruba like to have people come to see them, especially other Americans, but they are not equipped to cater to guests for long periods of time. They have an hotel of their own and there is only one restaurant in San Nicolas, the mushroom town that has grown up outside the compound fence. There are small Dutch hotels in Oranjestad, but most Americans who visit Aruba come on business and usually arrange to stay at the behelers' quarters and eat at the company mess. Travelers often come in by plane, either from Miami or Caracas, or they take the liners of the American and Dutch steamship companies that put into Aruba once a week. The Americans like to show visitors what a progressive place they have. They like to show you such things as the telephone exchange and the post office, and they like to drive on the paved roads that they have built over the coral.

They have car service, too, just as in the United States. You can park your car and bank, and a boy will come out and take your order for an ice-cream and a soft-iced cream. Sometimes fresh sweet milk is flown into the colony from Caracas, and you can buy frying-pan blue-eyes at Aruba.

One day one of the men was telling about all these improvements. He noticed also that he liked his work at Aruba and his pay was all right, and he thought the folks on the island were extra fine and friendly. Then suddenly he checked himself. "Aw, hell," he said, "I want to go home."



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